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Unrest in Soviet military cited by the author of 'Moscow Rules'

By Michael Conlon

Reuters

CHICAGO — The author of a new novel about a fictional military coup in the Soviet Union says he thinks there is more unrest in the Soviet military than is generally known, and he believes there is even a slim chance that his tale will come true. In the novel *Moscow Rules*, Robert Moss portrays military disenchantment with an aging Communist Party leadership.

Although the plot is fictional, it is laced with hitherto unreported incidents that Moss, a former editor of the *Economist's* "Foreign Report" intelligence newsletter, says are true.

He said in a recent interview that he culled his information from Soviet defectors, whom he collects "like some people collect antiques or beer cans."

One of the anecdotes in *Moscow Rules* describes a raid by Soviet special-forces units against Afghan Mujaheddin resistance fighters who, with the blessing of Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, had found sanctuary in Iran.

In the book's account, Soviet aircraft strafe the rebel camp, which is 40 to 50 miles inside Iran in a desert area north of the marshes of Hamun-e-Helmad. Helicopters land, and troops capture some of the resistance leaders and fly them back to Afghanistan.

Another anecdote centers on a Cu-

ban-run call-girl ring that Moss said operated in the U.N. delegates' lounge. The ring was closed down in embarrassed haste when its main customers — Soviet diplomats — discovered that it was Cuban-sponsored.

Published by Villard Books, *Moscow Rules* has already made the best-seller list in some American cities and is soon to be printed in Britain. The book addresses many of the same enigmas and themes that have intrigued Kremlin-watchers in the last few years.

The Soviet Union, Moss said, has "an unresolved, enormous succession struggle under way. They have not worked out ... how to transfer power, not just from one individual to another, but from one whole generation of political leadership to another."

"I think it is not outrageous to imagine that members of the high command are getting growingly restive and impatient at the absence of a firm hand at the wheel," he said.

He puts the odds of a military coup at about 1 in 10. Although that chance is slim, it is "a lot higher than at any stage since (the Russian Revolution in) 1917, partly because the army has grown so much in importance and power within the Soviet society," he says.

Moss, who previously co-authored *The Spike* and *Monimbo* with Arnaud de Borchgrave, speculated on who would succeed ailing Soviet President Konstantin Chernenko, and on

the impact that the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had had on the Soviet military.

"If [Foreign Minister Andrei] Gromyko succeeds Chernenko, which some think is likely, I think the restiveness will increase because it's another holding operation," he said.

"But whether it's [Politburo member Mikhail] Gorbachev or anyone else ... the party has, I think, discredited itself in the eyes of some of the elite in recent years by failing to break out of this mold of a fumbling gerontocracy."

"Add to this the Afghan factor. Afghanistan, of course, is not their Vietnam ... but it's having a very interesting political effect on the officer corps," he said.

Moss explained that he formed some of his impressions after conversing with a Soviet source who had a role in planning the invasion and helped mastermind counter-guerrilla operations.

"The high command wanted to go into Afghanistan ... the first place to test Soviet combat troops since 1945," Moss said.

But, he added, the long Afghan campaign has taken its toll on the men who have served there, similar to the ways in which some U.S. military personnel in Vietnam and some French troops in Algeria were affected.

"I think the feeling has developed that they ought to get in or get out," he said.